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Supporting Young People's Identity through Translanguaging in English as a Second Language Classroom[1]

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Abstract

This work highlights how monolingual English-based instruction prevents Nigerian children from acquiring literacy skills and, more, attaining a healthy sense of selves as bilingual language learners. A narrative qualitative inquiry approach was used to do a critical case study of elementary school students whose Mother Tongue (MT) is Nsukka Igbo, a dialect spoken in the eastern part of Nigeria, West Africa. Data was collected through classroom observations and formal and informal interactions with the children. The study was framed through translanguaging as decolonial theory and pedagogical practice, which allowed the author to think through the complexities of an imposed bilingual identity and to engage the students in English language learning (ELL). This paper provides insights into young Nigerian L2 learners' struggles with their identity, which may be of interest to all language teachers and shed further light upon the need for young people to learn in their MT. Although the results of this research may not be generalized due to the short duration of the intervention, the experiences shared here suggest that translanguaging has the possibility of transforming teaching practice in Nigeria and other language learning environments.

Keywords: translanguaging, identity, decolonial pedagogy, mother tongue, bilingual education

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Introduction

> When I entered the classroom, a child knocked on the desk. All the kids stood up and shouted excitedly, stressing every word: "Good morning, Sister. We are happy to see you. God bless you. See you next time". I smiled at them and moved to the back of the class, pondering the last phrase. The next day, I was greeted the same way. I thought that I should correct them by explaining, in Igbo, why the last phrase was unnecessary in that context, but I failed. I realized it was a memorized pattern used for greeting everyone who entered the class. As I entered the classroom, there were 48 kids squeezed into a small classroom with only one teacher. Due to limited space, most of the children hung their empty school bags on their backs as they sat on wooden benches.
> (Fieldnote, February 1, 2022).

Across the globe, the question of which, among a multilingual society's languages - national, dominant, or minority - to use in school, is being fiercely contested (Banda, 2010; De Klerk, 2000; Hancock, 2018; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). There is increased advocacy for bilingual education, where children can receive education in both their mother tongue (MT) or first language (L1) and the society's dominant language (Rodríguez-Tamayo & Tenjo-Macias, 2019; Silbernagel, 2015). Such advocacies have given rise to dual language programs in many countries. Debate around second language (L2) education has also increased with the ongoing promotion of the epistemologies of the Global South (Santos, 2016) with emphasis on decolonial and pluriversal theories and perspectives to education (Medina, 2021; Perry, 2020). Proponents of these approaches contest any dominant approach to literacy, including the designation of some languages as universal and therefore suitable for education, while a huge number of minority languages are suppressed. The pluriversal approach, according to Perry (2023) "unpicks a colonial past and neo-colonial present, a global market economy and knowledge economy driven by the Global North…" (p. 6). The pluriverse proposes a world of multiple worlds where different ways of knowing, learning and living could co-exist (Escobar, 2017; Ziai, 2018). A pluriversal world recognizes that every language, as a cultural artefact, is a knowledge bank, has relevance, and that no one language should be privileged above another.

Major characteristics of colonialism, no doubt, were linguistic and cultural domination, and the school system provided a fertile ground for achievement of these Language, observes Ravishankar (2020) is not an arbitrary fact of colonialism but a form of colonial violence. Decolonization, therefore, should include de-tooling the imposed colonial language, especially in the education sector. However, many countries in the Global South - such as Nigeria, continue to deliver education in the colonial language, that is, a language imposed on them by their colonizers, such as English, French and Spanish, - rather than in their numerous indigenous languages which evidence children's mother tongues (MTs). In this article, I take the stance of Ouane and Glanz (2010) who use the terms, MT and L1 interchangeably and relate both to using the language of daily interaction which children use prior to their first year of school.

Nigeria is one of the Sub-Saharan African countries where up to 50% of the population speaks an indigenous language as a MT (Gadelii, 2004). Yet, bi/multilingual education, that is, the use of two or more languages in education - one or more indigenous languages in addition to the official language - is seen as a threat to national cohesion (Bulcha, 1997; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). Consequently, monolingual education, that is, the use of only one language, usually the colonialists'-imposed language, is preferred and considered a unifying force (Anchimbe, 2006; Wolff, 2017). Reflecting on the state of language in African education, Ouane and Glanz (2010) note that "[b]eyond basic education, only 25 percent of the languages used in secondary education and five percent of the

languages in higher education are African" (p. 9). Additionally, no more than 15% of the local population is fluent in such languages.

In Nigeria, many families and rural communities such as Orba, where this study was conducted, use the indigenous language for daily interactions. Therefore, most children in such communities grow up as monolinguals, that is, speaking only their MT. They also come to school with little or no knowledge of the English language or culture beyond the idea that their parents and friends will be proud if they learn English. Although the Nigerian language policy recommends a transitional model of mother tongue-based bilingual education (MTBBE) (The Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), many schools nationwide offer English-only monolingual education (Baba, 2016; Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi, 2013; Igboanusi & Peters, 2015). The transitional model requires that teaching begins in the child's MT or language of the environment for the first three to four years of basic education, after which a dominant or national language becomes the language of instruction (LOI) through the university level.

With the preference for monolingual instruction, children are forced to stop speaking their MT from their first day in school, while another language, that is, the LOI is imposed upon them. In some cases, speaking the MT is met with corporal punishment (Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi, 2013; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). A major problem arises in that language is "the means through which we identify ourselves and are, in turn, identified by other (Katsos et al., 2021, p. 39). Therefore, when young people are separated from their language, they are made invisible, that is, separated from their means of perceiving and identifying themselves (Ravishankar, 2020). They may begin to feel that their MT is inferior to language of instruction, LOI. This can place on them a "psychological burden of linguistic inferiority" (Coronel-Molina, 1999). They are further faced with the arduous task of learning the primarily accepted/taught language, transitioning from competent monolinguals to incompetent bilinguals who must use one language at home and use a different one in school. With such an imposed bilingual identity without adequate preparations, the young people have little time to develop their identities in their MT.

Researcher's positionality

This study is born out of my childhood experience, growing up and completing primary education in Orba, a rural community in Enugu State, Nigeria. Until I started primary school, I was a monolingual, comfortably speaking only my MT. Everyone in my family and neighborhood spoke Nsukka Igbo, and constant interactions characterized our daily life. However, attending an English-only school made me cross linguistic and cultural borders, forcing me to acquire a bilingual identity. Coming from a non-literate (by cultural standards) home, that is, with parents who could neither read nor write, my experience was anything but pleasant. It left me with traumatic memories. The rule was: you must speak English, but if you could not, three options were available: receiving corporal punishment, a fine, or perpetual silence. Silence was the easiest of the three. Therefore, I became one of the silent kids in class. This identity of silence was one that was affectually imposed upon me.

As one who struggled with her bilingual identity from childhood, I was curious about others who had similar experiences and how they navigated their own identities and challenges. Remembering that the English language was a suppressive weapon used to silence me in school, I wanted to know if bringing back the children's MT in the classroom could make a difference and perhaps provide them with an alternative and pleasant learning experience. In this paper, I share my experience of a brief but powerful encounter with an elementary school student in Orba as he and his two friends struggled to make sense of their newly imposed bilingual identity. Although Chidi (pseudonym) was fluent in Igbo, the school's choice of English-only instruction meant he must simultaneously learn and be instructed

in English. Throughout my work with Chidi I was able to understand how he and his classmates struggled to fit into a system that offered them little academic content due to their limited knowledge of English and, more, limited their ability to explore their identities in healthy and productive ways through their MT. In my writing, here, I share these findings.

Building on my past experiences as a framework for understanding my own schooling and identity, I situated this study in Orba. I had hoped that by interacting with the kids in a familiar environment and their MT, I would be able to participate in the experiences of emerging bilingual children to understand their journey better and my own as well. In this study, I used translanguaging (García, 2011) to think through the complexities of an imposed bilingual identity and as a way to engage Chidi and his friends in English language learning. By translanguaging from Igbo to English, I gained valuable insights into the identity struggles of young L2 learners in Nigeria, which may be of interest to all teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) and shed further light upon the need for young people to learn in their MT.

Theoretical Positioning

The research referred to in this article was framed within translanguaging, a theory of L2 learning and decolonial pedagogical practice (Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2020; Otheguy et al., 2015; Vogel & García, 2017). De Costa et al. (2021) summarizes translanguaging as "a bi-/multilingual performance that allows bi-/multilingual speakers to use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire as a form of social practice to construct meaning within a specific context and local situation" (p. 134). From a theoretical lens, translanguaging contrasts the traditional "bounded notion" of L2 language teaching in which the target language was taught in isolation to avoid the influence of the learners' L1 or other previously acquired languages (Haukås, 2016; Lane & Mikihara, 2017; Parra & Proctor, 2022; Portolés & Martí, 2020). Proponents of the translanguaging model argue that bi/multilinguals have a unified linguistic system which governs their language behavior. They do not simply switch from one language to another during speech events because each of their languages does not exist in isolation (Baker, 2001; Orellana & García, 2014; García & Lin, 2016). In translanguaging practices, language learners are encouraged to activate and leverage all their linguistic resources or potentials, thus benefiting from their own multilingualism (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Dougherty, 2021; García, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012). None of the previously acquired languages is suppressed but instead, one language is used to reinforce the other. In addition, translanguaging could be a means to address the perspective of decoloniality, that is, "a process that aims to question and transform legacies of colonialism in institutions, structures, and ways of knowing" (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2024, p. 27). If colonialism involved forced imposition of language and knowledge systems on a people (Flores-Rodríguez, 2012), then decoloniality is the process of supplanting what was imposed and reclaiming what was lost, namely, the indigenous languages and their knowledge. Translanguaging is situated in this work as a form of counter-storytelling, which, according to Zavala (2016), is a decolonial education strategy through which "the master storylines of Modernity, Eurocentrism, and coloniality" are retold by the colonized. Vogel and García (2017) emphasize that the theory of translanguaging "builds on scholarly work that has demonstrated how colonial and modernist-era language ideologies created and maintained linguistic, cultural, and racial hierarchies in society" (p. 2).

Translanguaging is positioned in this paper as a decolonial pedagogy rooted on social justice, including minority language right (García et al., 2016; García & Leiva, 2014; Leonet et al., 2017). One of the false narratives of colonialism is that formal education is possible only in the colonial language (Alidou et al., 2006; Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019; Ouane & Glanz, 2010). While not underrating the

challenges of African complex linguistic landscape to the planning and practice of multilingual education, the past colonial history remains a strong force that continues to determine the choice of LOI in African education (Bamgbose, 2000; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). African languages are continually rejected by the school system. In Nigeria, for example, the indigenous languages remain at the periphery of education, and meaningful changes are not in sight due to complex issues, including non-training of bi/multilingual teachers and a lack of instructional materials in the MT languages (Ugwu, 2019, 2021a, 2021b). If it were not for these complex issues, translanguaging might offer a novel way to decolonize language education by allowing young people to develop a healthier bi/multilingual identity.

Research Questions

The preliminary literary research, personal reflection, and data collection lead me to develop the following focused questions:

1. What coping mechanisms do young people employ to navigate an imposed bilingual identity?
2. How does translanguaging affect young people's positionalities and their abilities to learn a second or an additional language?

Literature Review

Definition of Terms

For the sake of clarity, I define a monolingual as one who speaks or understands only one language. Monolingualism is therefore the practice of using one language for daily interactions. This practice is still dominant in many rural Nigerian communities especially among children and non-literate adults. I use the term, non-literate loosely to define individuals who cannot read or write. Additionally, a bi/multilingual is one who speaks two or more languages. A person who is oriented towards using one language has a monolingual mindset and vice versa.

Identity and Language Learning

Norton (2000) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). This definition points to how our lives are complex weavings of multiple experiences that transcend any one moment. It is by "knowing who I have been, based on my personal and cultural history, that makes it possible for me to maintain my determination to understand who I am now and be aware of the possibilities of who I may be in the future" (Coronel-Molina, 1999, p. 73). Wenger (2010) also believes that identity "incorporates the past and the future into the experience of the present" (p. 5). Therefore, identity formation is an ongoing process of growth. Broadly speaking, every learning experience offers an opportunity for an identity expansion or modification. A learner can be considered a social participant who makes meaning using the social world as a resource to constitute an identity. Learning something new is therefore ruffling one's identity. As the learner gains new insights, new ways of relating to the world emerge. Consequently, negotiation becomes an inevitable process of adjusting to the needed change.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) suggest that identities can be imposed, assumed, or negotiated by a group or individuals. Imposed identities, however, are not negotiable; assumed identities are accepted and therefore, not negotiated; and negotiable identities are usually contestable. However, identities are time and context bound, such that their state may change over time and space. For

example, a person may accept an imposed identity because they have limited or no power to resist it at a particular time, but if their situation changes, they might do otherwise. A negotiable identity is prone to change through the empowered design of the individual. Since human experiences change over time, negotiation of identity is also an ongoing process.

Any form of identity imposition, be it linguistic or cultural, will be characterized by power imbalance. Such imbalance might lead to a struggle or negotiation (hooks, 1994; Irizarry, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). A typical example is an ELL learning space. ELL students come to school with their respective identities already formed or acquired over time, grounded in their L1. However, as the school imposes bilingual identities on them, they are pushed to linguistically disadvantaged positions where they must learn new ways of using language and of relating to the world. "To speak a certain language is to essentially identify with a culture, to assume it as one's own and experience a felt unity in a group" (Ravishankar, 2020, p. 2). For children born into a particular culture, L1 acquisition emerges naturally as a form of cultural initiation. However, the situation changes when learning a L2. At that stage, individuals' linguistic and cultural identities have already been formed. Learning English as an L2, for example, entails learning an additional culture and becoming part of two cultures. There are bound to be cultural clashes because the L1 and L2 will offer two different worldviews to the learner. In a school context, this kind of experience could trigger a sense of loss of control if not handled cautiously because students are transiting from a level of linguistic competence to incompetence and from using language freely with much ease to using it cautiously to avoid mistakes. This phenomenon is even more difficult for ELL students saddled with the dual roles of learning English and learning the curriculum contents in English. In such a situation, identity negotiation could become a coping mechanism through which they position themselves as emerging bilinguals, that is, students who are acquiring an L2.

Rodríguez-Tamayo and Tenjo-Macias (2019) maintain that emerging bilinguals reconstruct their identities through their daily linguistic choices. Such choices may, however, depend on external variables, including what their receptors would like to hear, since communication is relational. Students learn a second or an additional language not just to please themselves but also to be socially acceptable in their learning spaces. Silence, for example, could be a linguistic choice. Emerging bilinguals may decide to keep silent, even when it is necessary to speak, because of a sense of insecurity (Morita, 2004). In that case, silence becomes a linguistic choice or a coping mechanism through which they express their identity. Silence may also be an imposed identity especially where a strict linguistic rule is put in place.

In the Nigerian monolingual classrooms, negotiation of identity through a multiplicity of languages is absent, limiting any identity development to the imposition or assumed. Ouane and Glanz (2011) state that "[t]he language question in Africa touches upon self-esteem and feelings of identity and reflects not only past and present political, economic and cultural dependencies, but also relates to fundamental and enduring hard-core governmental politics, internal and external" (p. 57). In this work, translanguaging is used as a teaching strategy to find out if it could facilitate L2 learning and positive bilingual identity in an ELL environment.

Translanguaging as Decolonial Pedagogical Practice

Translanguaging is an emerging perspective in bilingual education. It encompasses "both the complex and fluid language practices of bilinguals, as well as the pedagogical approaches that leverage those practices" (García & Lin, 2016, p. 2). Translanguaging is rooted in the critical post-structuralist school that challenges the traditional "bounded notions" or "strict language separation" ideology which characterizes L2 teaching (Lane & Mikihara, 2017; Mbirimi-Hungwe & Hungwe, 2020; Parra &

Proctor, 2022). The bounded notion compartmentalizes the languages of bi/multilingual learners such that each language is treated separately. The imposed arbitrary boundaries make it impossible for L2 learners to fully utilize the linguistic resources they acquire over time.

Translanguaging brings an alternative approach to multilingual education. It proposes that "multilingual people do not operate in linguistic isolation" (Parra & Proctor, 2022). Borrowing the term "repertoire" which was coined by Gumperz (1982) to mean "the totality of the linguistic resources…available to members of the society", translanguaging scholars applied it to the individual L2 learners' linguistic resources. They insist that "students should benefit from being multilingual by using resources from their whole linguistic repertoire" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Translanguaging practices, therefore, soften the imposed artificial boundaries between languages to allow for a more fluid language use (Kvietok-Dueñas, 2019; Leonet et al., 2017; Vogel & García, 2017). All linguistic resources become supportive assets for learning the target language. García, et al., (2016) state that translanguaging enhances students' text comprehension, provides opportunities for linguistic practices, and supports students' bilingual identity growth and socioemotional development. Additionally, fluid languaging might help ELL students to activate their prior knowledge, which is fundamental to learning, foster a learner-friendly environment, and lessen students' fears of making mistakes thereby increasing class participation.

Translanguaging can be a powerful way to ensure that young people retain their cultural identities because it accommodates many voices. In other words, students are allowed to express themselves either in the target language or the language they had acquired. Zavala (2016) believes that in the ongoing effort to supplant colonialism, the colonized must understand the "structural arrangements and cultural logics" in which they are still hemmed in. Such understanding could be the beginning of freedom. In Nigeria, as in many nations in the Global South, English is the "language of conquest and domination" (hooks, 1994). The continued use of English as the only LOI while rejecting the numerous Nigerian indigenous languages makes schooling a colonial practice.

However, Menon et al. (2021) believe that decoloniality is not a matter of supplanting "the dogma of the Western episteme" (p. 939) with the decolonial episteme. Instead, it is de-centering the West and affirming "the re-emergences, re-existences, and liberation of people dominated by the global westernizing" (p. 939). Translanguaging could play a mediating linguistic role in language learning environments through the fluid linguistic practices it proposes to offer.

Method

The Research Space

This study was conducted in a rural primary school in Orba in the eastern part of Nigeria. The people spoke Nsukka Igbo, a distinct variety of Igbo language. As part of my preparation for data collection, I interviewed a linguist from Orba who also taught Igbo in one of the Nigerian universities. I realized that Nsukka Igbo had no known written script, despite Nsukka, being a home to one of the oldest Nigerian universities. I chose Orba because first, Nsukka Igbo is my L1. Therefore, my high proficiency level provided an advantage to interact with the students and to attempt producing a script in Nsukka Igbo. Secondly, I knew from experience that for many children there, the school silenced their native language.

To reduce bias in the selection process, I made a preliminary investigation by visiting three primary schools in a particular village. One of the schools was public (government-funded) while the other two were private. I met with each of the head teachers, interacted with a few teachers, and observed the general atmosphere and the teaching and learning process. These interactions and

observations enabled me to select one school that might best serve my purpose, and it included an enclosed classroom for minimal privacy to observe and interact with students and to observe regular class attendance. I visited the selected school a second time and observed three teachers of different classes: K3 (aged 4-6), Primary 1 (aged 6-7), and primary 2 (aged 7-9). Lastly, I selected the second primary school based on their capacity to use language more engagingly and critically, which would enable me to interact with students and teachers.

Participants

This narrative qualitative research (Butina, 2005; Creswell, 2007) involved a critical case study of a nine-year-old primary school student, Chidi (pseudonym) as a focus child and his two friends, Emeka and Uche (pseudonyms) as co-participants. The focus child spoke Igbo Nsukka fluently but struggled with speaking English. I collected data through daily interactions and formal and informal interactions with him during and after lessons through translanguaging. I observed and listened to his interactions with his two friends who shared a desk with him. These activities lasted for two weeks. I spent approximately three hours a day in the students' class. Accommodating his two friends enabled me to gain deeper insights into their daily uses of language in a natural way and how the imposed bilingual identity affected their learning experiences. I made notes and audio-recorded my conversations with them as well as their side conversations. Side conversations in my data refer to the spontaneous and informal dialogues Chidi and his two friends often engaged in, usually in Igbo, during lectures.

My choice of Chidi as the focal child was coincidental. During my preliminary visit, I quickly noticed him because he was hardly attentive but played with the desk during lectures and class work. His unique, seemingly distracted behavior prompted my interaction with him. I spoke to him in English, inquiring why he was not writing his class work. He cast me a short glance and looked down. Two students sitting beside him began to laugh at him. I felt sympathetic, realizing how embarrassed he must have felt. Then I spoke to him in Igbo, repeating the same question. He responded that he had no textbook and could not find his exercise book. I asked him to share a textbook with the student sitting beside him and to write the class work on an old exercise book.

When I returned for the data collection, I realized that while some students had changed seats, Chidi remained in the same position, the last row in the back of class. When Chidi smiled at me, I was surprised that he immediately recognized me. Without a second thought, I moved closer to him. It seemed to me that he felt a sense of ease at my presence, which gave me room to begin interacting with him in a friendlier way.

In Chidi's classroom, the only language allowed to be practiced was English, although the teacher occasionally explained certain concepts in Igbo. Before the first lesson of the day, the classroom was always rowdy, with children chattering in Igbo. English lectures lasted an hour, after which students completed class work while the teacher waited. As the teacher graded the work, children who finished continued their chattering while those who took longer spent the time finishing. Those idle moments allowed me to engage Chidi in reading and formal and informal conversations. These moments also allowed me the opportunity to help him engage in his classwork.

I tried to make my daily encounter with him as natural as possible. I sat beside him, making conscious efforts not to disrupt his conversations with his friends except, when necessary, as when it disrupted their engagement with the teacher's instruction. As the children became used to my presence, I stood aside and listened to them or watched their movements and reactions. I made notes and used my phone to audio-record conversations.

Data Collection

Data in this work were the results of my daily interactions with, and observations of Chidi and his friends. I also used fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) to record my observations, reflections, how I applied translanguaging, and the contexts of each conversation and actions. To ensure interval validity and reliability (Creswell, 2007), I occasionally conducted member checking by referring Chidi back to our former conversations. I translated the Igbo dialogues into English as part of the data analysis. Since I could not locate any texts written in Nsukka Igbo, I used my knowledge as a native speaker to create a phonetic translation. When in doubt, I asked my family members' support during the transcription. My mentor read each transcript and checked my coding, thus adding to the validity of the data.

Data Analysis

I organized and prepared the data by transcribing the audio recordings at the end of each day. I compared the transcript with my fieldnotes and collated emerging themes. At the end of the field work, I analyzed the data using the six-phase guide provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis: (a) Getting familiar with the data (b) generating initial codes (c) searching for emerging themes (d) reviewing the themes (e) defining or categorizing themes based on recurring patterns and (f) interpreting and writing the findings. First, I read the transcripts and the fieldnotes several times until I became familiar with the entire dataset. I made notes on the general sense I got from the data. The fieldnotes and reflections I wrote each day made it easier for me to establish patterns that related to the research questions. I used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to develop more condensed codes, which were then modified as I established overlaps. I selected the most significant conversations and paraphrased some for a more focused analysis. I searched for themes (recurring patterns) that significantly captured, for example, Chidi's coping mechanisms. Lastly, I reviewed, modified, and collapsed some themes and developed primary ones. I further paraphrased some of the children's discussions to reduce the length of the data. Finally, I arrived at the following coping mechanisms: (a) escape from class and nonparticipation presence (b) loss of concentration and side conversations in the MT (c) silent resistance and forceful use of the MT. I also arrived at four positionalities: (a) as competent Igbo Speakers (b) as Incompetent and Vulnerable ELL (c) as Determined ELL and (d) as Identity Negotiators.

Findings

In what follows, to avoid undue repetition, I have placed the words and sentences that were spoken in English in CAPITAL LETTERS. Igbo expressions are in ***boldface and are italicized.*** I have placed my comments in *italics* and my translations of Igbo to English in regular fonts.

Coping Mechanisms: Navigating the Imposition of English

For Chidi and his classmates, the classroom was a place of identity negotiation and, as Norton and Toohey (2002) stated, "a site of struggle" (p. 116). Each time they spoke or read, they negotiated their identities as Igbo native speakers on the one hand and ELL learners on the other. During my time with them, I witnessed that they devised different coping mechanisms which enabled them to make sense of imposed bilingual identities and their learning experiences. Their major coping mechanisms are described below. Some of the coping mechanisms overlap.

Escape from Class and Nonparticipation Presence

On my first day in the school, I identified Chidi as a restless child who played with his friends and continually tried to leave or escape from the class to use the bathroom. His requests were turned down by the teacher several times, and this prompted my intervention. When I engaged him in a casual discussion, I realized that he was struggling with reading and could minimally speak English. Leaving the class to the bathroom became an avoidance coping mechanism since he found it difficult to follow the lectures. That same day, I applied translanguaging after a reading comprehension lesson. I realized that Chidi, like most of the students, engaged in choral reading, repeating loudly what the teacher read without looking at the text on their textbook or on the chalkboard (see figure 1). But sometimes Chidi went silent and at other times he repeated the words incorrectly, as shown below:

Teacher: HE SAID
Chidi: **SHE** SAID
Teacher: THE LADY SAID
Chidi: **SHE SAY THE SAY**

In the above instance, it was obvious that what Chidi was repeating did not make any sense to him, yet, by reading loudly, he could stay present and give the appearance of learning.

Figure 1. *Choral Reading and Repetition*

After several choral repetitions, the teacher asked the children to sit down and read aloud on their own. Chidi looked at the texts without uttering a word. Moments later, he pushed the book aside and covered his face on the desk - another coping mechanism. I asked him, in Igbo, to sit up and inquired if he could read the text. He shook his head, indicating "no". I worked with him to identify and pronounce each word, practicing several times until he could do that on his own. We discussed the meaning of each word, translanguaging between English and Igbo. I used his snack money to explain the concept of buying and selling. Excerpt:

Me: What is a BIRO?
Chidi: Something you put inside a book; (*demonstrates with his hands*). A BIRO is a RULER.
Me: No! What is this object I am holding?
Chidi: PEN.
Me: A PEN IS ALSO A BIRO. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
Chidi: YES.
Me: What is an ERASER?

Chidi: RAZOR
Me: No! Do you have a pencil?
Chidi: Yes
Me: Can I see it? What do you call this attached part of the pencil?
Chidi: CLEANER.
Me: Yes, you are right. But it is also called an ERASER.
Me: What is an EXERCISE BOOK?
Chidi: A book used to learn EXERCISE.
Me: What do you call this object*?* (*I lifted an exercise book on his desk*).
Chidi (*silent for a while):* it is called BOOK.
Me: It is an EXERCISE BOOK.

After the practice, I asked him general questions about the passage. When I asked him in English, "WHAT IS SHE SELLING?" Chidi kept silent. Then I repeated the question in Igbo: ***Gịnị bụ ọ na-ere?*** He enthusiastically responded in English: "BIRO, ERASER AND, EXERCISE BOOK". Through this simple translanguaging strategy, which became a regular pattern he learned to focus on individual words while reading (see figure 2). Each time I taught him how to read a particular text, he practiced repeatedly on his own, until he became used to pronouncing all the words without support.

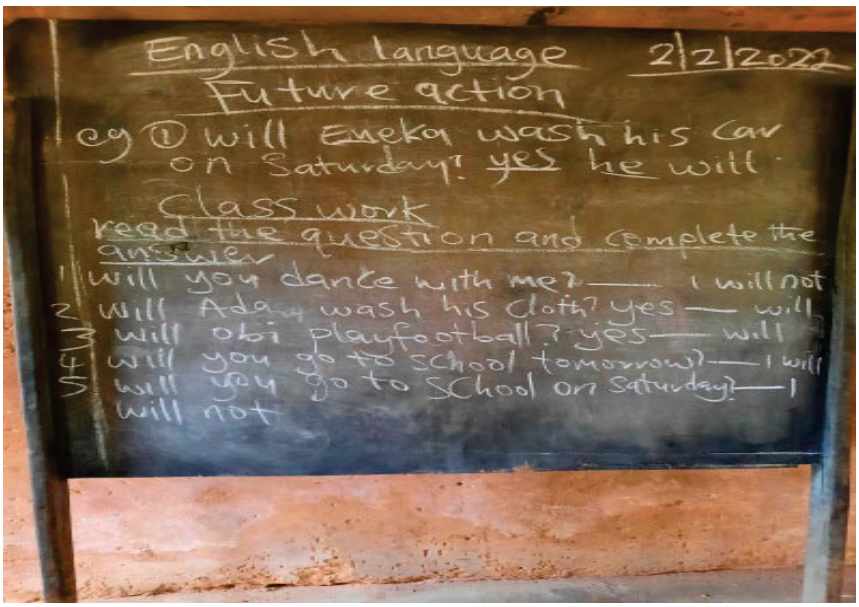
Figure 2. *Beginning to Read through Word Recognition*

Loss of Concentration and Side Conversations in the MT

Another coping mechanism Chidi devised was constantly talking with his friends, in Igbo, even during lessons. One day, the teacher was teaching "Future Action" (figure 3). The kids got busy with their usual choral "reading", sometimes adding their own words as they wished. Excerpt:

WILL YOU DANCE WITH ME? NO, I WILL NOT.
WILL *ADA WASH **HIS** [sic] CLOTHES? YES, SHE **IS** [sic] WILL.
WILL OBI PLAY FOOTBALL? YES, HE WILL.
**Ada is a popular Nigerian female given name and it means "first daughter". The textbook had an error, "his" instead of "her". The teacher copied the text on the board with the error* (Fieldnote, February 2, 2022).

Figure 3. *Lesson on Future Action*



As the above lesson was going on, Chidi and his friend, Uche (pseudonym), busied themselves with side conversations in Igbo (see figure 4). Excerpt:

> Uche, (*suddenly*)*:* We have entered the month of February.
> Chidi, (*boastful*): Yesterday was what?
> Uche: FIRST.
> Chidi: I would have said. (*A clipped phrase, "**Mụ ga asị"**, meaning, "I would have been surprised if" […you did not know…*]).
> Uche: When I was coming to school, I ate bread and pap. I also came with HUNDRED NAIRA [one hundred naira]
> Chidi: What I have is TWO HUNDRED NAIRA. (*He brings it out*).
> Uche: Your money looks fine, as if it was withdrawn from the BANK.
> Chidi: We have entered 2022.
> Me, (*interrupting*): When did we enter 2022? When did 2022 start?
> Uche: After the *Krismas* [CHRISTMAS] celebration. On *Krismas* night.
> Chidi: After the NEW YEAR celebration. On NEW YEAR night.
> Uche: See, it is written there (*points at the chalkboard*).
> At this point, they began to talk about the Christmas "KNOCKOUT" [firework].
> Me: Now, listen to your teacher!

In the above episode, the children's ideas flowed freely and spontaneously as they spoke Igbo. On a surface level, the ideas may appear disjointed, but it was a moment where they could assert each of their sense of self as they tested each other's knowledge of dates and seasons. I realized that what they discussed created a great learning opportunity which I quickly and briefly utilized.

Figure 4. *Side Conversation*

Side conversations mainly occurred when the children were engaged in repetitive or choral "learning". By pointing at the chalkboard, the children showed that they were not completely detached from the class. However, for Chidi and Uche, instead of repeating a set of sentences that did not make sense, they created their own safe spaces in which they used Igbo to recall their experiences and build knowledge for themselves.

Silent Resistance and Forceful Use of the MT

Two more coping mechanisms which Chidi used in the classroom were either responding in Igbo when spoken to in English or keeping silent. Several episodes demonstrated his use of either silence or forceful use of the MT. One morning, he came late to school. As soon as he settled down, I asked in English, "WHY WERE YOU LATE TO SCHOOL"? At first, he kept silent, but after a while, he responded, *"**Mmm…, an' m eku urua."*** (Mmm…, I was sleeping). Another example was when they shared their desires to learn English. But their excitement ended soon after as Chidi's attempt to speak failed. Excerpt:

> Me: Let us speak English now. Should we speak English?
> Kids, (*in unison):* Yeees.
> Me: okay, I will ask you some questions one after the other.
> Me, (*to Chidi):* WHY DO YOU WANT TO GO TO LAGOS?
> Chidi: TO THE, TO THE*… **Ge mu** ("so that I will")* GOING TO THE, THE WATER.
> Me: You're going to the water? Okay, when you get to the water, what will you do?
> Chidi: *Silent.* I prompted him to respond, but he refused until I changed the discussion to Igbo.

In the above conversations, language use became formal and Chidi's abilities to think and express himself were stifled. His words could not flow freely as self-doubt set in, and he went into identity negotiation through which he made a linguistic choice of either speaking or keeping silent. When his attempts to speak English failed, he receded into silence as a linguistic choice. The above conversation contrasts with the one below in which the three friends spoke spontaneously and playfully in Igbo. Excerpt:

Me: How will you get money to buy a car? What type of work will you do in Lagos?
Emeka: He will be a barrow pusher.
Chidi: I will do HOLY GHOST work.
Uche and Emeka started laughing, amused at his response.
Chidi, *(protesting):* It is this boy who said that I will be a barrow pusher.
Me: don't mind him. So, what work would you like to do?
Chidi: Borehole drilling.
Me: The same type of work your Daddy is doing?
Emeka: Your Daddy is a barrow pusher.
Chidi: HOLY GHOST FIRE! Get mad.
Uche: Your Daddy is an *okada* rider [commercial cyclist].
Uche (to me): His Daddy is a tailor.

In another instance, Chidi returned from the restroom after my intervention (this episode is described fully in the next section). We had the following conversation in Igbo:

Me: What did you say to the teacher?
Chidi: Exactly what you asked me to tell her.
Me: What exactly did you say to her?
Chidi: *silent*
Me: Did you speak to her in English or Igbo?
Emeka started laughing. Chidi lowered his head, but I urged him to respond.
Chidi: **A gwar' m ya iye hu I gwar' m, ne nwamunyi n'akpashim ike** (I told her that thing you said to me, that I urgently needed to use the restroom).
Me: Did you say it in Igbo?
He nodded, shyly. Soon after, he began talking excitedly to me, in Igbo.

The above conversation is another example of the linguistic tension that an imposed identity had on Chidi. He also experienced linguistic shame each time his friends laughed at his inability to speak English. His use of the phrase "that thing you said to me" was not a coincidence but a calculated linguistic choice. Since the rule was to speak English in class, it was only through an intervention such as the ones I implemented that he was able to find the courage to break the rule by speaking Igbo. He had previously doubted his linguistic competence and the ability to exert himself as an ELL learner. But the senses of anxiety and self-doubt contrasted with situations in which he was free to talk in Igbo as shown in the dialogue below:

ME: What did you do after school yesterday?
Chidi: I went to CATECHISM
Me: Where?
Chidi: ***N'ulo uka ime orie*** (In the Church at the Orie Market).
Me: After that, what else did you do?
Chidi: I went to BLOCK (*Block Rosary], a common prayer group for kids*).
Me: Can you repeat what you have just told me in English?
Me, *(in English):* WHAT DID YOU DO YESTERDAY, AFTER SCHOOL? CAN YOU REPEAT YOUR ANSWER IN ENGLISH?
Chidi: *Silent.*
I tried to cajole him into saying something, but he simply shook his head without uttering a word.

Once again, when forced to speak English, as shown in the later part of the conversation, he chose silence as a conscious linguistic choice. In conclusion, each time I tried to teach him English" through am imposed language practice, I failed.

Translanguaging and Students' Positionality

The teaching method in Chidi's classroom presented education as a "banking system" (Freire, 2005) in which teachers posit information into students. It was characterized by rote learning and failed to critically engage the children. A typical example was an episode after a science lesson on "Harmful Farm Insects". When the children were given classwork after the lesson, I wanted to find out, in Igbo, if Chidi understood the lesson. The following dialogue took place.

> Me: What is the meaning of "HARMFUL"?
> Chidi: **Iye di FULL**. (Something that is full).
> Me: No. *I explained the meaning.*
> Uche, (*reads):* HARMFUL FARMA INSECT
> Chidi (*protesting):* ***Gede mbe edere "A"? I siri FARMA. O bu FARM.*** *(Where is 'A' written? You said 'FARMER'. It is farm*).
> Me: What is "AN INSECT"?
> Emeka: That empty container used in the church by the Mass servers. They pour something inside and swing it, and then it smells.
> Me: Oh, that one is INCENSE. It is different from the word INSECT.
> Me: Let's read again. What is FARM?
> Chidi: That thing that blows air on people.
> Uche, (*laughing*): He said it is FAN.

The above example, and similar incidents, reflect how significant the impacts English-only or monolingual education has on learners' education. In Chidi's class, the children regurgitated facts and concepts as an equivalent to learning. The above example was more surprising because the school was surrounded by farmlands visible just by looking through the windows. However, the children could not connect their learning with their environment due to the language barrier and perhaps also the teacher's shortsightedness to go beyond the textbook to offer practical, hands-on learning opportunities. Faced with different learning challenges, the children positioned themselves differently at different times. Some examples are discussed below.

Positionality as Competent Igbo Speakers

Throughout my work, I noticed that Chidi and his friends positioned themselves as competent Igbo speakers who were developing bilingual identities as ELL learners. Chidi continued to assert and exert himself as an emerging bilingual. For example, after a reading lesson titled, "Telling how to do Things", the children were given classwork, but I realized that Chidi could not complete his. I worked with him using translanguaging. This had two direct impacts on him. First, he understood the passage and moved from literal to a deeper level of comprehension, as shown in the dialogue below, which was in Igbo:

> Me*:* From what we have read, did Musa's mother teach him how to cook yam?
> Chidi: Yes
> Me: Next time, if Musa wants to cook yam, what will he do?
> Chidi: He will cook it, and if his mother is not at home and he is hungry, he will take some yams and cook.
> Me: What did you learn about cooking yam?

> Chidi (*suddenly and with boldness):* Sister, I know how to cook yam. I used to cook yam at home.
> Me: All right. Please explain to me how you cook it.
> Chidi, (*with much excitement)*: I cut the yam, wash it, wash the pot and pour the yams into the pot. Then, I pour some water into the pot and put it on the fire. After some time, I pierce it with a knife to know if it is soft. If it is not hard, then I bring it down.

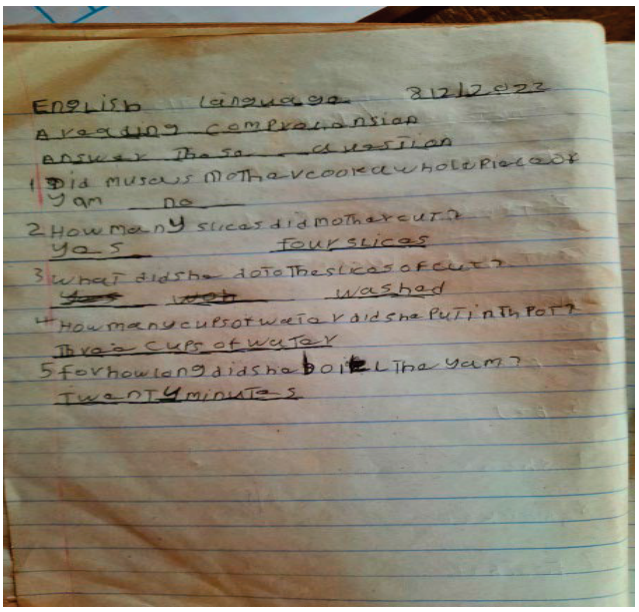
As shown in the dialogue, translanguaging enabled Chidi to connect the reading passage with his everyday experience of cooking yam, a stable Nigerian food. He further engaged with the text in a significantly personal way by expressing his identity as "an expert in yam cooking" (Chidi). He moved to a deeper level of reading comprehension, introducing several ideas that were not explicitly stated in the text. For example, he brought in the idea of "piercing the yam" to find out if it was cooked. By adding that Musa should be able to cook yam for himself whenever he was hungry and his mother was not at home, Chidi moved to the level of critical literacy.

The second impact of translanguaging was that Chidi could self-correct his classwork. Initially, he wrote "Yes" or "No" as answers to all the questions (see figure 5).

Figure 5. *Chidi's Classwork Before Translanguaging*

Before applying translanguaging, he had written numbers 1-3 of the classwork as shown in Fig. 5. When I stopped him, and we discussed the passage using translanguaging, he realized his mistakes. He erased what he had written and wrote different answers as shown on figure 6).

Figure 6. *Chidi's Classwork after Translanguaging*



Positionality as Incompetent and Vulnerable ELL

An episode in the class offered a glimpse into Chidi's constant struggles with his imposed bilingual identity and how translanguaging became an unavoidable tool for negotiating his sense of self. It was a moment of confrontation with English and what it symbolizes in his life. A lesson had just ended, and the children were completing their classwork when Chidi suddenly stood up. I spoke to him, in English:

> Me: WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
> Chidi*: **Gẹ m je sị Auntie, gẹ m je* **EASE MYSELF.** ***Nwamụnyi na-akpa m.*** (*Let me go and tell the auntie, let me go and ease myself. I want to use the bathroom*).

Although Chidi's MT was not welcomed in the class, the urgency of his need required him to speak up. Therefore, he positioned himself as an emerging bilingual capable of exerting himself through translanguaging. He negotiated his expertise in English and skillfully chose the keywords, "**EASE MYSELF**" that might present him as not completely failing the linguistic rule of the class but could enable him to obtain his request thereby retaining a positive sense of self. Unfortunately, things did not work out as he had hoped. He returned sooner than expected looking downcast. He continued standing and was restless. Then I asked him,

> Me: YOU DIDN'T GO? WHY?
> Chidi (*sullenly*): ***O siri m***, GO BACK! (*She said to me, "go back"!)*

Chidi uttered the phrase, GO BACK with a dejected countenance and an angry tone of finality that made both his frustration and a sense of defeat clearly visible. It occurred to me that I needed to intervene at that moment to enable him to maintain a positive sense of identity as an ELL. I bent low, touched him gently on the shoulder and spoke to him in Igbo.

> Me: Do you really need to use the bathroom?
> *He nodded without looking at me.*

Me: Go back and tell her, in Igbo, that you really need to use the bathroom, as a matter of urgency.

He went back to the teacher. I watched him as he moved forward, hoping that if the permission was rejected again, I would have to approach the teacher and insist on it. However, the teacher granted the request. He went out, came back later and continued with his classwork. The intervention I was able to implement through translanguaging gave him the necessary support.

Positionality as Determined ELL

Despite Chidi's struggles with English, there were crucial moments of triumph when he manifested his deep-seated proficiency in Igbo and spoke in ways that were surprising. This study was carried out during a political crisis in the Eastern part of Nigeria, so, Mondays were designated as "sit-at-home" or "lockdown" days, and all forms of movement, economic activities, and school attendance were prohibited. Before the lesson began on a Tuesday morning, I initiated a conversation in English but noticed Chidi's sudden discomfort and unresponsiveness. Then I changed to Igbo:

Me: Did you come to school yesterday?
Chidi: No.
Me: Why?
Chidi: Yesterday was not a school day.
Me: But yesterday was Monday. Is Monday not a school day?
Chidi: It was LOCKDOWN day.
Me: Why is there a LOCKDOWN on Mondays?
Chidi: I don't know.
Me: What happens on LOCKDOWN days?
Chidi: ***Ịfụta, a LOCKA gị DOWN.*** (If you come out, they LOCK you DOWN).
Me: What does it mean to LOCK somebody DOWN?
Chidi: ***Asua gị ẹka n'ishi, i dee eshi.*** (*You'll receive a hard knock on your head, then you'll shrink*).

The most interesting part of the above conversation to me was Chidi's last statement. The rare diction *"I dee eshi"* confounded me because it was a rare - phrase used by only the older generation of Nsukka Igbo speakers. The phrase was more profound than any English word I could associate with it. I found myself, an adult native speaker, having to learn new vocabulary from a nine-year-old child. At home, I asked my mother to help and learned the translation, which means "to shrink".

Reflecting on the dialogue later, I also realized how Chidi played on the word "lockdown" to derive a personal meaning, "a day associated with violence". He used his expertise in the MT to assign meaning to a socio-political issue around him. In doing so, he showed his inherent creative potential in language that could flourish if he had opportunities to fluidly use language by translanguaging between Igbo and English.

Another revealing moment with the children was when Uche exhibited his 'prowess' in speaking English in a novel, yet funny way. While a lesson was going on, Uche suddenly initiated the conversation below:

Uche (boastingly): If I speak this particular English, none of you will understand it.
Emeka (*daring him):* Ok, speak it now!
Uche (*boastfully):* HOW UNA DEY? (Nigerian Pidgin, meaning, "how are you all?").
Emeka: It means, "Where are you going"?
Uche laughs proudly.

Me (*interrupting*): How about Chidi? What did he say is the meaning?
Uche (*beamingly*): He said that he does not know the meaning.
Me (*to Uche*): So, what is the meaning?
Uche (*boastfully*): *It means,* "HOW ARE YOU".

The above conversation shows the place of English language in the children's life. To Uche, speaking English in a novel way gave him a sense of pride and made him happy. By using a Nigerian Pidgin English, he showed how his bilingual identity is naturally developing in a social context. Chidi displayed a similar sense of joy one morning. As soon as I entered the class, he said to me excitedly, in Igbo, "Sister, I practiced the reader yesterday. I can read it".

Me: If I ask you to read now, can you?
Chidi: Yes. *Then he opened a passage we had practiced the previous day and read it for me.*
Me, (*to Uche*): Did you practice it?
Uche: ***E nwegi mu ekwukwo*** (I don't have the book).

Positionality as Identity Negotiators

Another experience emerged during a conversation about "going to Lagos", an idea that came up due to the consent form I had sent to children's parents. A parent came to the school the next day, and inquired from me, *"My child said that you intend to take him to Lagos"*. I was surprised. Later, I realized that the children had misinterpreted my mission in their school. This led to a discussion through which they shared complex linguistic perceptions of English, their motivation for learning, and how English helped them retain their senses of selves. Excerpt:

Me: Why do you want to go to Lagos?
Chidi: So that I will get money.
Me: Money? What do you want to do with money?
Uche, (*to Chidi, with an alarming tone):* If you get there, you'll be speaking English!
Emeka *(also sounding alarmed)*: ***Chidi, ị dị SURE n'ịmara asụ English***? (Chidi, are you sure that you can speak English*?*)

The children imagined that moving to an environment in which English would be the only language of communication should be taken seriously. As the dialogue unfolded, Uche and Emeka indicated that they would like to leave their present school, "where children were seriously flogged" (Emeka), to Lagos, where they would learn English.

Uche: …I want to speak English so that my Daddy and others will say that I could speak English so that they will be happy, [and] …I will be so pleased with myself.
Chidi: …I want to go to Lagos …so that when I return, I will speak English, and my Mummy and Daddy will be happy with me.
Emeka: I want to speak English …so that nobody would speak Igbo to me again.
Me (*to Emeka)*: Why not?
Emeka: I don't like the way Igbo people speak.
Me: How do they speak?
Emeka: When they insult you, you too insult them in return. And I don't want to insult people in return.

The children revealed in the above conversation how learning English was tied to their retaining senses of selves as individuals who needed to be accepted by their families. It was an existential challenge with which they had to struggle. Moreover, since their proficiency in Igbo could not guarantee

acceptance or power, it was not surprising that another child, Emeka (pseudonym), wanted to distance himself from his Igbo identity. By equating Igbo with a language used for "mutual exchange of insults" Emeka identified English as a purer language incapable of being used for unpleasant communication, such as for insulting people. Another revealing aspect of the above dialogue was the use of corporal punishment in school. The children imagined that in the cities, they would learn English and by so doing, escape corporal punishments which, as I also noticed, were given to students who could not read. One day, Chidi stood in front of the class and read. He returned to his seat looking happy and triumphant. But when he sat down, he looked at the other students kneeling in front of the class. Then he shouted, pointing at one of them, **"*Chinwe esekpumeru ala*!"** (Chinwe (pseudonym) is kneeling down)!

> Me: Why is he kneeing down?
> Chidi: Because he couldn't read.

From Chidi's happy response, I imagined his sense of pride for being able to read which in turn elevated and spared him the humiliation of kneeling down. I remembered my childhood days when I too was punished for not being able to read. Meanwhile, Chidi's reading improvement through my brief intervention was a proof to me that the children's inability to read was tied to their limited competence in English. They also had inadequate attention to developing literacy skills using the best practices in teaching. Several similar incidents convinced me that my daily encounter with Chidi and his classmates brought positive changes in their struggles to find a voice in the classroom. A day before I ended the fieldwork, I watched him and Uche playfully practicing reading, while translanguaging between English and Igbo:

> Uche (*reading*): THIS IS…
> Chidi: ***Gede mbe ederu THIS?*** (Where is THIS written?)
> Uche (*points at the word*): ***Lekwe ye!*** (Look at it!)
> Chidi *(pointing at the picture on the book):* ***Nke a bụ WOMAN*** (This one is WOMAN).
> Uche: ***Ọ bụ ịlẹka*** **MAN** (It is rather, MAN).

The above dialogue reflects how easy and flexible reading became for children, after being empowered to use language fluidly.

Discussion

The experiences I share highlight how the use of English as the only LOI prevents Nigerian children from acquiring literacy skills and, more, attaining healthy senses of selves. Learning, as Wenger (2010) explains, is "a social becoming" (p. 3). It is a transitory and transformative process through which one negotiates a new way of being without entirely giving up what one had been, that is, one's identity. To subvert their perception of themselves as competent monolinguals yet incompetent bilinguals, the children needed a supportive classroom in which the rich linguistic resources they had acquired as competent Igbo speakers could be used to reinforce their learning of English. However, such opportunities were unavailable due to the school's choice of English-only LOI. The choice had negative consequences, including low-level literacy acquisition and an inability to use language creatively and meaningfully.

Despite the different coping mechanisms, the children's identity positioning as incompetent speakers of English manifested in loss of concentration, loss of control, feelings of vulnerability, alienation, and a desire to distance themselves from their cultural identities. There were also instances of "linguistic shame and inferiority" (Coronel-Molina, 1999). Whenever the children had opportunities to communicate in Igbo, their ideas flowed spontaneously and creatively. However, when forced to

speak English, self-expression became difficult, and language use became formal and mechanical, making them feel linguistically incapacitated. Subjugation and a feeling of inadequacy are some of the effects of colonialism (hooks, 1994). The preference for monolingual education, as exemplified in Chidi's classroom, makes many Nigerian classrooms a colonial space.

A decolonial pedagogy such as translanguaging offers an opportunity to decenter any dominant language in the learning space thereby allowing a more fluid language practice. Translanguaging gives room for many language possibilities in the teaching-learning process. On the contrary, monolingual teaching practice in the dominant language will continue to perpetuate the "global constructions of functional literacy education as Eurocentric and neo-colonial" (Perry, 2020, p. 2). Through my use of translanguaging in Chidi's class, positive impacts were made, including increased learning and the ability to retain their sense of self. The young people shifted from mere memorization of facts and concepts to active participation in class and critical literacy. In the yam story, for example, I did not have to teach Chidi everything about yam cooking; I rather learned from him because he was experienced in it.

I posit that translanguaging has outstanding potential for Nigerian children and can be a useful decolonial practice. Within the short period of time I spent in the school, the bond between Chidi and me was strengthened. I was not sure what he thought of each time I stepped in and out of the class, but his excitement whenever I stood aside and watched suggested that his zeal to study exponentially increased. The words and sentences written on the pages of his books were no longer mysteries with which to be grappled. They became representations of reality and offered him more opportunities to renegotiate his identity as an emerging bilingual.

Reflecting on my encounter with Chidi, I realized that Nigeria has continued to sustain an oppressive language policy that is harmful to young ELL learners. As I think of the long, difficult roads I have traversed to reach where I am today, I wonder how different life could have been if someone had been afforded as a resource and shown me guidance and hope. Somehow, I know that he still has a long way to go, but I also hope he will sustain the zeal with which I left him.

Conclusion

In discussing the use of the MT in bi/multilingual education, highly multilingual countries like Nigeria, often present apparent challenges that cannot be taken for granted. Questions such as, *Which language should be used?* and *Which language should be left behind?* will always come to mind. No doubt, the problem is more complex when many of such languages are not standardized and lack written versions and instructional resources. With such complexities, monolingual education with a preference for either the dominant or ex-colonial language might be seen as the best option. However, insights from this study suggest that monolingual education harms children who are learning to be bilingual and reduces their chances of attaining critical literacy skills. Students need to learn the language of instruction, be it a dominant or national language, both to succeed in school and to connect with the global world. However, that should not be done at the expense of their cultural and linguistic identities. MT is the window through which they make sense of their world. To suddenly cut young people off from their identities is destructive. It decontextualizes the lessons, makes language learning mechanical, thereby reducing their chances of learning the target language.

In all my engagements with Chidi and his friends, it was evident that an oppressive language practice disengaged them from their MT and was a significant hindrance to their literacy acquisition. It silenced them and made them vulnerable. Colonialism, according to Santos (2016), "is a system of naturalizing differences in such a way that the hierarchies that justify domination, oppression, and so

on are considered the product of the inferiority of certain peoples and not the cause of their so-called inferiority" (p. 18). English language naturalized differences in Chidi's learning space. Lack of competence in English made him feel inferior several times and alienated him from the class. However, his situation hardly received attention until I encountered him. Without the intervention, I could have perhaps misjudged him as a low ability or misbehaved child who could not settle down in class.

In ELL classrooms, teachers need to create opportunities that allow children to tell their personal stories and connect new information with their contexts by using language freely and naturally. Such freedom could give them the required space to negotiate and own their identities as L2 learners to whom developing higher competence in the target language is a gradual process. Translanguaging can offer such opportunities. In my research study, it enabled the children to reinforce their learning using the resources they had gained from Igbo, their L1. If the translanguaging practices were sustained, Chidi could emerge not only as a bilingual but also as one with the capacity to engage in both local and global cultures and practices.

Chidi was not the only child who needed support. Many children in his class did. As I stepped out of their class on the last day of my fieldwork, I looked at them and thought of how long it might take them to reach the level of literacy needed to compete with their future colleagues in the global world. Although I promised to teach them English, each time I visited home, my daily encounters with them also made me realize how grossly incompetent I had become in my MT. This was prominent when Chidi used Igbo dictions that were deeply enriching but remote to me.

Evaluation of Contribution to the Field

This study contributes to current understanding of the challenges of teaching English in an ELL learning space. While this research cannot be generalized due to the short duration of the intervention, it does show that translanguaging has the potential to transform teaching practice in Nigeria and in other second or additional language learning environments. More studies are needed to show the long-time implication of applying translanguaging on young people and in an L2 situation. My proficiency in Nsukka Igbo, the language of the participants gave me an invaluable advantage to connect with their daily realities. However, I wonder how translanguaging might have worked if I was not competent in the students' L1. Further studies with teachers not proficient in students' L1 languages could offer insight into classroom practices, teacher talk, coping mechanisms and a healthy sense of self, etc. I also wonder what could have happened if the students spoke different languages. These wonderings open a space for future research, including how translanguaging might work in multilingual contexts, including where students speak different languages or where teachers and students do not speak the same language.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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